



# LIFELINK

## NEWSLETTER

### Page 1

Veteran Promotes Lethal Means Safety

### Page 2

September Plan of the Week  
Notes, Lifelink Spotlight

### Page 3

3 Ways to Take ACTION this  
Suicide Prevention Month

## Veteran Helps Advance Conversation on Lethal Means Safety

As veteran Jay Zimmerman notes, a service member's firearm is "almost like another appendage." Zimmerman understands military culture and has a love for firearms, stemming from frequent hunting trips with his grandfather while growing up in the Appalachian region. Today he's advocating for service members and veterans to practice lethal means safety when it comes to firearms and dealing with prolonged stress or psychological health concerns. Lethal means safety—keeping highly-lethal methods of suicide out of reach or less accessible during times of particularly high stress—is an important part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent suicide.

Zimmerman served in multiple combat zones as a former Army medic and his service weapon was essential to his and his comrades' safety. But after navigating psychological health challenges and losing a good friend and fellow soldier to suicide, he reached a crisis point. His relationship with his wife, with whom he reconnected during the heat of his crisis, drove him toward the decision to seek help. He now champions the impact that taking simple precautions has had on his life, like storing his guns safely so that he can't make any "rash decisions" when he hits a rough patch. In a recent [National Public Radio story](#), Zimmerman explains that he stores his guns disassembled and separately from ammunition. He's also made a special arrangement with friends "if things get really bad" so that they can hold onto his weapons until he feels like it's safe to reclaim them.

For service members, transitions, relationship issues and career or personal setbacks can lead to increased stress and increased suicide risk. In addition to taking the precautions Jay Zimmerman champions, both active and reserve Sailors can work with their commanding officers and health professionals to arrange safe storage of their personal firearms during high-risk periods, per [NAVMIN 263/14](#).

Zimmerman is now a peer counselor at a local VA medical center and has connected with a meaningful purpose. He travels to speaking engagements and conferences across the country sharing his personal story and encouraging service members and vets to practice lethal means safety when they're not feeling like themselves. He also coaches therapists and clinical

providers on how to productively discuss these precautions with patients.

Zimmerman recognizes the perceptions that may influence a service member's decision to voluntarily store their personal firearms or practice safety at home (such as using a gun lock). He notes that many are worried that they'll "lose the gun that [they] carry pretty much all the time" if they opt for voluntary storage. But he emphasizes that this isn't the case and illustrates how this personal decision can be both empowering and life-saving. His decisions to seek help and protect himself have led to him living a fulfilling life supporting other veterans.

Firearms are the most commonly used means of suicide across military and civilian populations, due in large part to easy access and high-lethality. 1 Small ACT, such as securing your firearm with a gun lock or arranging for temporary safe storage, can save a life. Check out the *Every Sailor, Every Day* campaign's new lethal means safety graphics and posters [here](#). Stay tuned for additional products addressing other ways to practice lethal means safety, such as proper disposal of unused medications.

## UNDER MORE STRESS THAN USUAL?

Take a few extra precautions to store your firearm.



Store firearms unloaded with a gunlock in a secured cabinet, safe or case.



Closets, drawers and shoeboxes are not safe locations!



Keep ammunition in a separate secured storage location.



A few extra moments to retrieve and unlock your firearm can interrupt the impulse for suicide and open the door for help.

Every Sailor, Every Day

[navstress.wordpress.com](http://navstress.wordpress.com)



## Lifelink Spotlight

### SAIL: “The reason I’m still alive”

Suicide risk is highest in the 90 days following an attempt or other suicide-related behavior (SRB), making access to care vital to support recovery. Moreover, annually, an average of 35% of Sailors who died by suicide had previous psychological health care but for various reasons, ceased treatment or didn't return when problems resurfaced after the initial treatment period. The Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) Program was designed to prevent care from falling through the cracks by offering Sailors a series of caring contacts in the first 90 days after an SRB to ensure access to ongoing resources and support. SAIL case managers are Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) counselors who initiate contact with the Sailor via phone and—if the Sailor decides to participate in the program—follow up at key intervals to assess risk, coordinate care and assist with reintegration.

Since was introduced to the fleet in December 2016, more than 800 Sailors have been offered SAIL services. About half have accepted participation in this voluntary program. Recently, a Sailor shared feedback on their experience participating in the SAIL program, stating that it was “the best thing that could have happened to me throughout my treatment.” The Sailor noted that everyone they encountered helped objectively and without judgement, allowing the Sailor to express how they felt “to someone who is actually listening and cares.”

Convenience was also a strong factor in the Sailor’s positive opinion of SAIL, noting that services were prompt and accessible, the counselor was knowledgeable and professional, and the information provided was useful. “The SAIL Program may be the reason I am alive at this very moment,” the Sailor expressed in their anonymous feedback. The Sailor noted that being able to consistently talk to someone helped to take the weight off of their shoulders in between psychological health appointments.

SAIL is not therapy and doesn't replace psychological health services or treatment. However, SAIL does complement these services by ensuring that the Sailor remains connected to a qualified professional who can engage additional resources to support their recovery and offer hope.

As a Suicide Prevention Coordinator, ensure that you have completed SAIL training and that both you and your commanding officer are familiar with the program's processes and benefits. Check out this [fact sheet](#) for more information.



## Plan of the Week Notes

*Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of September:*

1. This Suicide Prevention Month, challenge yourself to 30 Days of Small ACTs. Visit <http://go.usa.gov/xRADv> for a printable calendar containing a tip or healthy habit to practice daily. Post it in high-traffic areas in your command to encourage your shipmates to strengthen their psychological health and be there for Every Sailor, Every Day.
2. When it comes to suicide warning signs, remember IS PATH WARM: Ideation, Substance abuse, Purposeless, Anxiety, Trapped, Hopelessness, Withdrawal, Anger, Recklessness and Mood changes. These signs may indicate that a person is at immediate risk of suicide. You don't have to see every sign to ACT (Ask, Care, Treat). Visit <https://go.usa.gov/xRsgJ> for more information and resources.
3. Not feeling like yourself? When facing emotional challenges or prolonged stress, using a gun lock on your personal firearm can prevent suicide. A few extra moments to retrieve and unlock a secured firearm can interrupt the impulse for suicide and open the door for help. The VA and Navy Suicide Prevention Branch have partnered to offer free gun locks at local Fleet & Family Support Centers and Navy Operational Support Centers while supplies last. Get yours today. 1 Small ACT can save a life.
4. If you are in emotional pain or if you hear something from a shipmate that concerns you, reach out for help. You can call the Military Crisis Line 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255, press 1; text 838255; or visit [www.militarycrisisline.net](http://www.militarycrisisline.net).

## Submit your Suicide Prevention Month Efforts for DoD Recognition

The Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) is conducting its second annual Outreach Recognition Ceremony to honor one exemplary installation from each of the Services and one from either the Reserves or National Guard. This competition recognizes the installations with the most dedicated and influential suicide prevention activities during the month of September. Efforts should be robust and focus on communicating safely about suicide and/or promoting lethal means safety (refer to the **1 Small ACT Toolkit** for resources). To begin the submission process, email [suicideprevention@navy.mil](mailto:suicideprevention@navy.mil), subject: SP Month Nomination. Final entries are due by Oct. 13. Only one entry per installation (or homeport).

## News and Resources

Navy Suicide Prevention Month  
[NAVADMIN 217/17](#)

Navy Suicide Prevention Month  
Resources  
[Navy Suicide Prevention](#)

Navy Observes September as  
Suicide Prevention Month  
[Navy.mil](#)

Coping with Stress and  
Trauma  
[All Hands Magazine](#)

Crisis Negotiation: How to Talk  
to Someone You're Worried  
About  
[AFSP](#)

Suicide Prevention: Ask. Care.  
Treat.  
[NavyLive](#)

Yoga: Why Soldiers should be  
Doing it  
[Guard Your Health](#)

Practicing Good Nutrition  
Boosts Personal Performance  
[Military OneSource](#)

## Current and Upcoming Events

**Suicide Prevention Month**  
Sept.

**National Suicide  
Prevention Week**  
Sept. 6-10

**Webinar: "From Awareness  
to Action: Lessons Learned  
from Navy's Annual Cross  
Disciplinary Case Reviews"**  
Sept. 7, 12 p.m. EDT  
[Register here](#)

**World Suicide Prevention  
Day**  
Sept. 10

**SPC Training Webinars**  
Sept. 14, 12 p.m. CDT  
Sept. 27, 2 p.m. CDT  
[Register here](#)

## 3 Ways To Take ACTION This Suicide Prevention Month

Suicide Prevention Month is an opportunity to reenergize the conversation and set a positive tone for the upcoming fiscal year. Here are three meaningful ways to build community, strengthen protective factors and demonstrate your command's commitment to suicide prevention:

- 1. Connect with your shipmates.** Use this month to find everyday ways to make a difference to others. Bringing a shipmate a cup of coffee or sharing a meal together may seem small, but they can have a huge impact when someone is feeling disconnected. These are also opportunities to check in on your shipmate and offer a listening ear. Pay attention to cues that may be **warning signs** of a crisis, like indicating that they feel like they're trapped by their current circumstances; are more agitated, angry or anxious than usual; are drinking more alcohol than usual, etc. If you hear these or other concerns, ACT (Ask, Care, Treat). Start by asking if they're thinking about killing themselves. Listen closely and **let your shipmate know you care** about their well-being and are concerned for their safety. Get your shipmate to someone who can help: a Navy chaplain, provider or call the Military Crisis Line (1-800-273-TALK, press 1). Don't leave your shipmate alone and remind them that you will be there to support them throughout their recovery process. Check out **BeThe1To.com** for additional tips to help someone in crisis.
- 2. Get Moving, Together.** Exercise strengthens our physical and psychological health, and can boost connection with others; protective factors against suicide. Organize a 5K walk or run aboard your ship or installation in support of suicide prevention and Total Sailor Fitness. Include stations along the route to educate and motivate participants, like a trivia table staffed by the command SPC, health promotion coordinator, drug and alcohol program adviser (DAPA) or other personnel. Use the information in the **1 Small ACT Toolkit** to develop questions related to self-care, stress zones, suicide risk and protective factors, and offer incentives to those who participate. You can also set up a Small ACT Selfie station stocked with printed signs and markers. Snap a photo of participants holding their completed signs and email them to [navysuicideprevention@gmail.com](mailto:navysuicideprevention@gmail.com) for inclusion in the **1 Small ACT Photo Gallery**. Following the event, collect the signs and post them throughout high-traffic areas in your command to serve as reminders of the simple ways to be there for others and support your own psychological health.
- 3. Share Stories of Hope and Recovery.** We are all influencing the conversation about stress and suicide and have the power to reshape negative perceptions. Less than one percent of security clearances are revoked or denied because of psychological health reasons. Real-life stories of those who have sought help for psychological health concerns and have gone on to live healthy and productive lives can be powerful reminders that help works. **Make the Connection** offers testimonial videos featuring service members and veterans that you can share on social media or play during a small group discussion, such as **this veteran** describing how he got through tough times with support from friends and family. You can also view and share the story of **PRC Jeromy Kelsey (Ret.)** from the NavStress YouTube page. Be sure to brush up on how to safely communicate about suicide by checking out the tips in the **1 Small ACT Toolkit**.

Every Sailor, Every Day starts with US. For additional ways to make a difference and lead by example, download the **30 Days of Small ACTs calendar** and share it with your shipmates.

